

EDITORIALS

Utah Joins the *WJM* Family

THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE welcomes the Utah State Medical Association to the growing family of western state medical associations which have recognized *WJM* as their official journal. This was accomplished by an action of the USMA House of Delegates at their 1979 meeting, and beginning with this issue the members of USMA will receive *WJM* as a regular benefit of their membership. This will be in the form of a special UTAH EDITION which contains a special section for USMA readers in addition to the usual content of the journal. This special section is prepared by USMA and is under the direction of a Special Editor for Utah. It will provide a forum for communication between the association and its members.

The *WJM* seeks to be a truly useful journal for its readers, the greatest number of whom are practitioners. It seeks to offer a variety of fare which also will include something of interest for students, academicians, researchers and even political leaders of our profession—of whom there are many among its readers. It seeks to reflect the vitality and achievements in science, education and practice that are hallmarks of medicine in the West, and to give these a stronger presence in the medical literature. The editors, the editorial board and many others are dedicated to making this journal a regional instrument of physician education and continuing education in the West, and also an increasingly distinguished journal on the national scene.

The medical profession in Utah has much to contribute as well as to receive from the *WJM*. The University of Utah College of Medicine is of national renown in scholarship, and the state has many innovative leaders in medical practice and health care. It is hoped and expected that some of this scholarship and innovation will find expression in this journal.

We welcome USMA and look forward to a long and productive association which should be of great benefit to all concerned.

—MSMW

Mushroom Poisoning

IT IS SAFE to say that the incidence of mushroom poisoning is directly related to the prevalence of mushroom hunters. For this reason, mushroom toxicity has traditionally been a matter of greater concern in central and eastern Europe than in North America.

Before 1960 very few Americans gathered and ate wild mushrooms, but in the past 20 years there has been a great upsurge of interest in mushrooms in the United States. Thousands of enthusiasts now comb the woods in the summer and fall with field guides, baskets and digging tools. Some of these mushroom hunters are looking for "natural foods" or "natural highs"; others have simply discovered the fascination of a new hobby. While some are cautious and some are bold, a sense of gastronomic adventure pervades this activity, and mushroom poisoning is clearly on the rise.

The incidence of poisoning is difficult to ascertain because reporting is not mandated by law. The US Department of Agriculture Poison Fungus Center received reports of 105 cases with two fatalities in 1973, with only eight states reporting. However, in Colorado alone an average of 50 confirmed cases annually occurred over four years (1972 to 1975). This high incidence was disclosed through the combined efforts of the regional poison center, the Rocky Mountain Mushroom Club and the medical facilities in the state.¹ Therefore, it is likely that the true frequency for the nation as a whole is much higher than the reports suggest.

Approximately 5,000 species of fleshy mushrooms occur in the United States. Generously speaking, no more than 300 of these are likely to attract attention as potential items of food. Of these, approximately 100 species are known to be toxic, at least under some circumstances, and about a dozen are potentially lethal.

At least seven types of mushroom toxicity are known, and there are scattered reports of toxic reactions which fit none of the seven. Most toxicologic studies have been concerned with the most